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16 April 1962

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE BULLETIN



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France: Premier Pompidou's cabinet is basically similar to ex-Premier Debr 's, with the Gaullist Union for the New Republic (UNR) predominating, although Pompidou had apparently tried to broaden its political base and increase its "political" vis-a-vis "technician" elements.

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A recent report described Pompidou as a very intelligent, broad-minded person whose close association with De Gaulle might permit him to exercise a moderating influence. Ambassador Gavin, however, in comments on the Pompidou appointment and the 8 April referendum, noted that De Gaulle now could assume an even larger share of executive power. Gavin cautioned against any expectation of improvement in French-US relations, particularly on nuclear matters. He believes De Gaulle's nationalism may find a growing audience among leaders and officials who previously favored close cooperation with the US and NATO.

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Venezuela: Plotting against the Venezuelan Government by rightist military officers and civilians is increasing. The arrest on 10 April of a prominent newspaper editor allegedly involved in the plotting reflects growing official concern over a possible revolt attempt by rightist groups in the near future. Ambassador Stewart reported that President Betancourt fears the Argentine situation may encourage Venezuelan military leaders to take action against the government. While security forces appear capable of suppressing any leftist outbreak, they might not be able to contain a revolt supported by a substantial number of units of the armed forces.

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[Laos: Phoumi intends to continue his search for a formula that would put King Savang at the head of a government combining the country's diverse political elements. According to a high government official, Phoumi now is intrigued with a suggestion that the King preside over a government that would include Boun Oum, Souvanna, and Souphanouvong as vice premiers. Phoumi apparently is still determined not to have Souvanna as premier, but would be willing to have the defense and interior portfolios go to Souvanna's neutralist center. This plan envisages a cabinet made up of four rightists, four leftists, and eight neutrals.]

[Confirmation of Phoumi's willingness to relinquish the posts of defense and interior would appear to remove a major stumbling block to a settlement, but the acquiescence of Souvanna and Souphanouvong, as well as of the King, to the overall plan remains doubtful]

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Congo: In a 13 April conversation with Adoula, Ambassador Gullion gained the impression that the Adoula-Tshombé talks face another crisis within a few days, with the possibility of an indefinite recess. Adoula showed the ambassador a position paper which claimed large powers for the central government at the expense of the provinces, and described the latest paper by Tshombé as a retreat from the Kitona talks to a most negative position. Adoula did not say, however, that the next meeting would mark the close of the talks, [and there are indications that he is determined to achieve a solution to the Katanga problem by the end of April, reportedly because of his intention to visit the USSR in May.]

Recent incidents between UN and Katangan forces in Elisabethville have increased tension, and observers liken the present atmosphere to that which prevailed before the December

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fighting. Tshombé, who apparently desires to avoid a third round of hostilities with the UN, may attempt to impose restraint upon his forces if, as expected, he returns to Elisabethville at Easter.

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Syria: The Syrian Army's success in getting Nazim al-Qudsi to resume the presidency further reduces the chances of open unrest in the near future. The immediate prospect is for complex maneuvering among civilian elements in response to Qudsi's call for formation of a "transitional" cabinet and resumption of constitutional government. [Former Defense Minister Barmada has reportedly been in the process of trying to form a cabinet since 8 April]

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Both Qudsi and the army appear to recognize a necessity to give greater expression to pro-UAR, left-wing opinion in the next government. [Two cabinet posts have reportedly been reserved for the left-wing Baath party.] Qudsi's statement of the terms of his return to office included a commitment to the "realization of genuine unity" with Egypt and underlined the need for stability to ensure economic progress.

If Qudsi and Barmada are successful in forming a cabinet on these principles that is also acceptable to the army, Qudsi's announced plan is to call for a referendum on unity with Egypt and new parliamentary elections. The US Embassy in Damascus comments, however, that it sees no reason to expect elections in the near future.

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Algeria: [Provisional Algerian government (PAG) vice premier Ben Bella left no one in doubt as to his dominant position among Algerian leaders during arrival ceremonies for him in Tunis on 14 April. In his speech Ben Bella made no reference to the PAG, the Evian accords, or premier Ben Khedda. The PAG will begin meeting this week to plan for

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[future political activity in Algeria, but the presence of Ben Bella could mark the beginning of a power struggle, as there are indications that Ben Bella is dissatisfied with the record of the present PAG, whereas the PAG is furious over public statements Ben Bella made during his recent visit to Cairo.]

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[The PAG, which on 15 April publicly expressed impatience with OAS activity in Algeria, reportedly has discovered that representatives of De Gaulle and OAS leader Salan have been attempting to negotiate for Salan's "escape" from Algeria to South America.]

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[if such a plan would end the fighting in Algeria, the PAG would not oppose it.]

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*Argentina: President Guido held urgent meetings over the weekend with political and military leaders to request that they make new proposals by today to help resolve the political crisis. Most political authorities agree that in order to avoid a military dictatorship, congress must make the crucial decision on how to deal with the Peronista election victories. Apparently, Guido has not yet received assurances that the Chamber of Deputies will act on this matter when it meets today to discuss amendments to the law on presidential succession. Senate approval of amendments to this law on 14 April did not extend to the Peronista problem. The Senate action, however, would allow postponement of the presidential elections until October 1963.

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Rightists Plot to Overthrow Venezuelan Government

A major source of dissatisfaction with the Betancourt regime has been recent economic decrees which increased the cost of many imports. The government measures--taken to prevent a possible balance of payments crisis--caused a violent reaction in the press and the business sector.

Luis Nunez, the newspaper editor arrested for "rightist plotting," was charged with permitting the publication of an inflammatory article in the widely read Caracas daily El Universal. President Betancourt told Ambassador Stewart that the article contained code words designed to "trigger unspecified subversion," and that Nunez' association with a notorious military plotter led to the arrest.

Betancourt--wary of the similarities between conditions in Venezuela and Argentina--appears concerned over repercussions to his austerity measures. To help forestall a serious rift, he plans to form a National Democratic Front to be composed of business and professional organizations and the two major political parties.

Military leaders are disturbed by continued leftist violence and recent attacks against national guardsmen. Although most officers are considered loyal to the regime, some could be provoked into cooperating in a rightist revolt if the government fails to deal more firmly with subversive elements. [redacted]

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